



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA

**KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH**  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 10, 2023

23-035

### **New findings spotlight health and well-being of Hawai'i students**

HONOLULU, HI – The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH), Department of Education (DOE), and University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), Curriculum Research & Development Group recently released high school and middle school data from the 2021 Hawai'i Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) for the state and all four counties. The Hawai'i YRBS is a biennial survey that has tracked data trends since 1991. The Hawai'i YRBS regularly monitors the health risk behaviors of public, non-charter school students statewide with more than 11,000 Hawai'i students in grades six through 12 participating in the 2021 survey. Topics covered in the survey include unintentional injuries and violence; tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy; protective factors; mental health and suicide; dietary behaviors; and physical activity.

Caution is advised by the Department of Health when reading through the results of the 2021 YRBS study, which was conducted under historically different conditions for public school students who in the previous 12 months were attending school fully or partially online. The YRBS is normally administered in the Spring semester however, due to COVID-19, the YRBS was administered in the Fall semester in 2021. Students' home and school lives were dramatically affected during the COVID-19 pandemic, which, combined with the change in dates of survey administration, may account for many of the findings.

The Hawai'i 2021 YRBS data highlight several areas of improvement during the pandemic. Compared to 2019, results from the 2021 survey indicate an increase in physical activity among high school students with 23% (up from 17%) reporting they were physically active at least 60 minutes per day in the past 7 days. The data also show a decline in youth

substance use with 3% of high school students (a decrease from 5%) and 2% of middle school students (a decrease from 4%) smoking cigarettes in the past 30 days; 15% of high school students (a decrease from 31%) and 7% of middle school students (a decrease from 18%) using electronic vapor products in the past 30 days; and 12% of high school students (a decrease from 17%) and 3% of middle school students (a decrease from 7%) using marijuana in the past 30 days.

It should be noted that the pandemic dramatically reduced retail access and social interaction which may influence changes in these risk behaviors. While youth tobacco and marijuana use appear to have declined, one year of data does not constitute a trend, and they remain a priority public health concern. The decline in use of electronic vaping products was also associated with the outbreak of e-cigarette and vaping associated lung injury (EVALI) cases. Much work still needs to be done to prevent youth at risk of nicotine and other drug addiction.

The Hawai'i YRBS highlights the ever-evolving challenges youth face today. Adolescent mental health continues to remain a concern. Key findings from the 2021 survey reveal that more than half of students (54% of middle school and 56% of high school students) never or rarely got the help they needed when experiencing feelings of sadness, emptiness, hopelessness, anxiousness, or anger. Only 75% of middle school and 74% of high school students reported having an adult at school or at home who they could talk to about things that were important to them.

“Our goal is to improve the health and well-being of Hawai'i's children, adolescents, and young adults by supporting the connections between positive health outcomes and academic achievement for the betterment of our students,” said Lola Irvin, Department of Health Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Division administrator.

Survey procedures protect students' privacy by allowing for anonymous and voluntary participation. The data is gathered from students in public high schools and middle schools across the State of Hawai'i.

The Hawai'i YRBS is part of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The YRBS trend report, with limited National YRBS survey results, was released by the CDC and is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs>. The full report will be released later this year.

Hawai'i's YRBS data is made available to the public through the Hawai'i Health Data Warehouse (HHDW), a long-standing partnership between the Department of Health and the University of Hawai'i Office of Public Health Studies. For more information on the Hawai'i YRBS, including state and county results from 2021 and previous years, visit <https://hhdw.org/data-sources/youth-risk-behavior-survey> and [www.hawaiihealthmatters.org](http://www.hawaiihealthmatters.org).

HHDW will be providing a 30-minute online webinar on how to access Hawai'i 2021 YRBS data at 11 a.m. Tuesday, April 11, 2023. Click [here](#) to register.

The following links provide custom dashboards of a selection of YRBS results by state and county within HawaiiHealthMatters.org.

[YRBS 2021 State Results](#)

[YRBS 2021 Hawai'i County Results](#)

[YRBS 2021 Honolulu County Results](#)

[YRBS 2021 Kaua'i County Results](#)

[YRBS 2021 Maui County Results](#)

###